Notes & Topics

SABDA & RUPA

Every religion has an element of symbolism. Dharma, Mahayana or Chchos is not an exception. Word or sound and mark or portrayal are characteristic expressions.

We often receive enquiries about hymns and prayers and symbols and images. Material in answer to such queries will be presented in the pages of this Bulletin.

Tsong Khapa's Song of Spiritual Experience, original text with Ulchungpa's English rendering, is the first item in this issue. A note on the Eight Auspicious Objects is the concluding item.

NCS

EIGHT AUSPICIOUS OBJECTS

Tashi (Skt. Mampya or Sabha) is explained in Maha Mangala Sutra (1) and also in Mungoiraya (2). Both the books define the word Tashi in four and other ways. Nagarjuna (3) in Sankal-bhika (4) expounded this further and said that one can gain salvation by these ways (1).

It is also said that one who knows the Dharma (5) and practises it, gains the luck for this world and as well as in the other world. In this connection Jampal Shenpen (6) explains thus: to understand the Dharma is accumulation of learning (7) and the good fortune is accumulation of moral merits (8).

41
Because the Buddha had blessed (4) the eight objects in order to bestow good fortune or happiness on the living beings these objects came to be known as Eight Auspicious Objects. In Tibetan tradition these objects are displayed after a consecration or installation ceremony to bestow good fortune or happiness on all living beings. The eight objects can be explained in two ways: legendary and symbolic.

LEGENDARY

One can find in the pages of Lalitavistara (◊ སྣ་ཐ་ཆེན་པོ་) that some of these objects were offered to Gautama the Buddha on different occasions. There is controversy about the gods and people offering these objects. The scholars of Sakya and Gelug were almost agreed on the following offerings (4).

1. Mirror (ལྷན་ཐོབ་) — The light holding goddess (ྱ་བཞིན་བྱུང་བོ་) offered the mirror to the Buddha and He rendered it holy.

2. Intestinal concretion (སློབ་མེན) — Found in the entrails of certain animals and in the neck of an elephant — The land guarding elephant (ལྷ་ན་བཀོད་པ་) offered it to the Buddha and He blessed it as a holy medicine.

3. Cured (ཕན) — Daughter of farmer (ཚེ་ལེགས་བོད་རྒྱལ་མིང་) offered it to the Buddha and He blessed it as a food free from impurity (tin).

4. Durwa grass (སློབ་ཕྲུད་) — The Buddha was offered this holy grass by the grass seller, Mangala (དོན་བཤེས་) . This was blessed by the Buddha as symbolic of long life. It is also said that Gautama attained Enlightenment sitting on this grass, under the Bodhi tree.

5. Fruit (སྲིད་ལྗོངས་) — wood apple — Brahma (སྲེལ་ཀུན་) offered it to the Buddha and He blessed it to be the best fruit.
6. White conch-shell (क्षुद्र गोविन्द) — Indra (इंद्र) offered it to the Buddha after His Enlightenment, when he (Indra) begged Him to turn the Wheel of Law (धर्मक्षमाकूट). The Buddha blessed it and blew it before He preached the First Sermon. It is symbol of propagation as well as the lamen of doctrines. "क्षुद्र गोविन्दः धर्मकूटः। ध्रुवम्।" (6).

7. Vermilion (सिंदुर) — The Brahmans Kāngali (कांगली) offered it to the Buddha and on Buddha’s blessing vermilion became the mark of overpowering knowledge.

8. White mustard (हल्दी) — Vajrapani (वज्रपानि) offered it to the Buddha and which was blessed as a demon defeating sword.

In Ruzen Tersol (रूजन तर्सल) one finds that the Brahman Kandali (कंडली), offered the grass (No.4), goddess of tree (सप्तकंठिणी) offered the fruit (No.5) and mother of earth (सूर्यकृति) offered the vermilion (No.7) to the Jina i.e. the Buddha.

SYMBOLIC

I

The Eight Auspicious Objects symbolise the Noble Eightfold Path (आचारयोग), laid down by the Buddha. The Noble Eightfold Path consists of—

1. Right Thought (सत्यचेतना)
2. Right Speech (सत्यवचनस्वभाव)
3. Right Mindfulness (सत्यस्मरण)
4. Right Livelihood (सत्यनिष्ठा)
5. Right Effort (सत्यशक्ति)
6. Right Thought (सत्यचेतना)
7. Right Speech (सत्यवचन)
8. Right Mindfulness (सत्यस्मरण)

43
5. Right Action (सहीक्रिय / अन्यन्याय / अस्वेत्यन्याय)

6. Right Speech (सहीव्य / अन्यन्याय / अस्वेत्यन्याय)

7. Right Meditation (सहीध्यादि / अन्यन्याय / अस्वेत्यन्याय)

8. Right View (सहीव्य / अन्यन्याय / अस्वेत्यन्याय)

Right Thought is the correct understanding of the doctrine and the thought which gives rise to exposition of the doctrine (4). The mirror symbolises the Right Thought as it holds the right reflection without change.

The great philosopher, Santi Deva (सांति देव) explains the Right Mindfulness as meditation on Right Mindfulness which protects one from ignorance and passion and suffering. (5). Giwang represents the Right Mindfulness being a medicine, which cures the ailment and keeps one’s mind free.

Cord symbolises the Right Livelihood as it is a food free from any impurity (sin).

Vasubhandhu’s (वसुभंधु) commentary on Suttadhamma / सुठत्थ (9) describes the Right Effort as the practice of Dharma for Life Eternal without any difficulty or harm. As we shall see below the symbolic meaning of the grass is longevity.

Right Action is forsaking the sin and adhering to the virtue (11). Fruit symbolises success in such action.

White conch shell stands for Right Speech as it produces a melodious sound which can put down other sounds. Right Speech is always free from any faulty statement or evil words.

Verification represents the Right Meditation. The great reformer Tsongkhapa (तोंग्क्लास) explains that by Right Meditation one can gain the highest power (11).

White mustard symbolises the Right View. It subdues the evil spirits as the Right View can defeat the wrong views.
Symbolum of these eight objects can be read from the point of benefit. Thus eight Auspicious Objects symbolise benefit either to self (अस्माय देवकार्याः) or to others (प्राप्तः देवकार्याः). The mirror represents the self and the rest symbolise the others.

Mirror, as one can see one’s own reflection in the mirror, the Buddha knew all the things without having any doubt when He had the vision, that is the Bodhi (Knowledge). In this way mirror symbolises the self benefit.

The Buddha’s kinds deeds that is deeds for others’ benefit can be in four ways: quiet (अभयत्वं) abundant (सूक्ष्मत्वं), power (सत्त्वं) and terrific (कलर्वं).

Generally the quiet service can be performed in two kinds, relief from illness and ignorance.

Intestinal concretion stands as relief from illness as itself is a medicine and as we have seen above as the best medicine which was blessed by the Buddha.

Curd symbolises relief from suffering due to ignorance. According to Uttaraparvantha the essence of the Bodhi is in the ten stages of perfection of a Bodhisattva "देवकार्यस्य अंतं नववर्गि। शास्त्रधर्मांसरित वेदम् । देवकार्यस्य अंतं नववर्गि। देवकार्यस्य अंतं नववर्गि। (1). In this way curd symbolises the essence of Bodhi; the curd being made from milk which contains the essence of all grasses "सा देवकार्यस्य अंतं नववर्गि। देवकार्यस्य अंतं नववर्गि। (4).

Abundant service may be in three ways: life (संप्रदाय) happiness (सौन्दर्य) and doctrine (दिग्धमति).

Grass represents long life; in Kunhchog Tendon’s (कुन्न्धुट्योन्दु) works one finds the name of this grass as Chikab (चिकाक)
The power service is rendered by vermilion. Vermilion represents the power of the knowledge. The Sanskrit word Sinduram (सिंदुरम्) has lost its correct pronunciation and became Sitar (सीतर) or Sedara (सेदारा) is Tibetan (31). It has a name as red sand रक्षणात्रिक/रक्षणार्क (32) and the red colour itself stands for power when the four services are symbolised by the colours "विना देवी तथा सिंदुरात्रिकार्क दीपा" (33).

The terrific service is that of the white mustard. The white mustard symbolises force. The other name of mustard Kadampab, कदाम्पत्य (34), means conquest or suppression of evil. The white mustard is also known as Siddha (75). It is significantly the last in the display of the Eight Auspicious Objects. It guarantees the success of the seven previous offerings as well.
BENEDICTION

At the conclusion of the ceremony the head priest greets as follows:

May mirror purify defilements in your thought.
May concretion end your misery.
May card quieten the three poisons (i.e. lust, hatred and ignorance)
May grass prolong your life.
May fruit fulfill your desires.
May white conch-shell spread your reputation.
May vermilion make your dominion firm.
May white mustard subdue your enemies (16).

NOTES

2. Tenjur, ནོ་བོ་རོ་ Vol. རེ་ p. 337.
5. Some as under note No. 4.
26. Same as under note No. 4.

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